



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

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Testimony of the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities Before the Government Administration and Elections Committee

Submitted by Gretchen Knauff
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Good Afternoon Senator Cassano, Representative Jutila and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Sections 13, 16 and 24 of **Raised Bill 1051, An Act Strengthening Connecticut's Elections**. The agency supports these sections and encourages the Committee to pass them with changes described below.

The Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities (OPA) has been working with the Office of the Secretary of the State and the Registrar of Voters Association of Connecticut since 2000 to improve the experience of voters with disabilities in all phases of the election process. In addition to addressing discrimination against voters with disabilities, this agency's project, Every 1 Counts, focuses on educating Registrars of Voters about the rights of voters with disabilities and provides technical assistance in all aspects of voting that affect people with disabilities. Every 1 Counts staff has worked with the Secretary of the State in determining polling place accessibility waivers, developing polling place accessibility surveys, publishing informational materials and addressing issues that create barriers for voters with disabilities. Every 1 Counts staff has also attended Registrar of Voters conferences and met with Registrars in their municipalities to provide training and technical assistance, answer questions, and distribute written information to assist Registrars in upholding the voting rights of people with disabilities.

Section 13 of Raised Bill 1051 makes changes to Connecticut General Statutes §9-192a that require, rather than permit, either the Registrar or Deputy Registrar of Voters in each municipality to participate in a training prescribed by the committee established in C.G.S. §9-192a to adopt criteria for the training, examination, and certification requirements for registrars and deputy registrars. It is my understanding that the Office of the Secretary of the State is working with the Committee to develop this training program. OPA urges the Government Administration and Elections Committee to amend Section 13 to add that any such training require a module on the rights of voters with disabilities including the requirements of the various state and federal laws affecting the rights of voters with disabilities.

In addition to the requirements under Connecticut's election statutes, many federal laws provide protections for people with disabilities who historically have been disenfranchised in the voting process. The Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Help America Vote Act mandate

access for people with disabilities to the physical and procedural aspects of the voting process. These are important for all election officials to understand and for the SOTS to incorporate into their training.

Both Sections 16 and 24 of Raised Bill 1051 require the Secretary of the State to develop materials for posting in polling places to provide information to all voters. Section 16 requires the development of voter identification requirements and Section 24 pertains to posting information about Constitutional amendments. OPA urges the Government Administration and Elections (GAE) Committee to amend Section 16 and 24 to require that any such materials be developed to be accessible to all voters including voters with visual impairments. The materials should be posted so that a person, who uses a mobility device such as a wheelchair, will have the ability to read such a posting.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on **Sections 13, 16 and 24 of Raised Bill 1051**. OPA urges the committee to support these sections with the changes as detailed in this testimony.

If there are any questions about this testimony or the rights of voters with disabilities, I am available at the numbers listed on the letterhead.